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From the Desk of

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*Thought you might find
the attached of interest.*



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The Third Strike in Nuclear War

Arms builders, arms-controllers and nuke freezers suffer a common delusion about the nuclear balance. They cling to the false notion that the Soviet Union, like the US, is dedicated to maintaining a "second strike" capability with strategic nuclear weapons. The fact is, the Soviets have created and will attempt to maintain "first" and "third" strike strategic forces. The Soviets are quite content to let the West concentrate on its second strike capability.

This fundamental disparity of basic architecture between Soviet and US strategic nuclear forces could have been predicted in the mid-1960's, but it was not. During that time, we adopted the Mutual Assured Destruction doctrine. This doctrine, with the apt acronym of MAD, seeks to avoid nuclear war by limiting both the US and the USSR to strategic forces capable only of wreaking a terrible vengeance if attacked. That is, both sides were to limit themselves to a single "second strike" force comprised essentially of inaccurate, city-busting weapons. A necessary corollary to this doctrine was that both sides should forego defending their populations lest the terribleness of the vengeance on which the whole idea depended be weakened.

We adopted this doctrine in the mid-1960's and followed it in both our force structure and arms-control efforts. The Soviets did not. From Moscow's point of view, the US can count on its own Assured Destruction if we wish, but they will by no means allow it to be "mutual." They declared the MAD doctrine as nothing less than "bourgeois naivete" Sad to say, they are

right: MAD's "no defense" policy is "bourgeois" in that it is a doctrine concocted in essence to save money, i.e., by avoiding the costs of defensive systems. It is naive because it assumes that both major powers would forego for all time the natural imperative of defending themselves against nuclear attack. It was also naive to assume that the Soviets would declare null and void large chunks of Marxist-Leninist dogma which would have been required if Moscow were to go along with MAD.

The Soviets steadfastly maintained that while a nuclear war would be very destructive, the Soviet Union would emerge victorious. Western adherents to the apocalyptic vision of total destruction, "Nuclear Winter," and "no winners" can hoot at the Soviet position on the matter, but they ought to realize that, rightly or wrongly, the Soviet are deadly serious in their view of nuclear war.

One need not just accept Soviet statements about thier prevailing in a nuclear war. Their strategic forces provide unequivocal evidence that they mean what they say.

One quite obvious indication is that the Soviets totally reject the MAD notion that defending one's homeland and people against nuclear attack is "provocative and destabilizing." If one looks at Soviet military expenditures over the past 15 years, one finds that startling fact that they have put one ruble into active and passive strategic defense systems for every ruble they have put into offensive nuclear systems. The Soviets have been investing at least the equivalent of two billion dollars a year in Civil Defense alone. For more expensive is the massive Soviet

array of active strategic defenses to include anti-ballistic missile systems already deployed and a vigorous development program for country-wide ballistic missile defense. (Part of the latter is the big anti-missile radar which has been much in the news since it violates the ABM Treaty.)

As for their nuclear offensive systems, the Soviets have shown their disdain for the MAD theorists' insistence on "second strike" forces only. They have concentrated enormous energies and resources to create first and third strike forces instead. The Soviets don't need a "second strike" force. It's assumed purpose would be to deter a first strike by the United States.

The Soviets, whatever their rhetoric may convey, know that a first strike by the United States is an extremely remote possibility. The nature of our society and our history of restraint, even when we had both the capability and good military reasons to use nuclear weapons, are well known in the Kremlin. More important, perhaps, to Moscow is the obvious incompetence of the US strategic force for a first strike. A few of our weapons could be used in a counterforce role, but the bulk of them are as advertised -- "second strike" retaliatory forces. No special effort is required to deter a US first strike. Certainly the Soviet first strike force is more than adequate to deter such a move.

The Soviet strategic nuclear force concentrates almost exclusively on long-range ballistic missiles, land-based and submarine-based. These are the weapons that can deliver a first strike because they can reach their targets within thirty minutes after launching. They have shown far less interest in

slow-reacting second strike weapons such as bombers and cruise missiles. Only a small fraction of the 2300 long-range missile launchers in the Soviet inventory -- certainly less than one third -- would be required for a first strike against US and Allied retaliatory forces.

Why all the additional force, then? For those who mirror-image our "second strike," Mutual Assured Destruction doctrine into the Soviet minds, the only reason for all this "overkill," as they choose to describe it, is to be sure the Soviets have enough surviving missiles presumed after a US first strike to wreak a suitable nuclear vengeance. After all, that is why our side needs more than "enough."

This is blatant and dangerous nonsense. The rest of those missiles are the Soviet version of "deterrence" -- deterrence of the real US threat, a second strike. They constitute the "third strike" force, the force that makes the first strike a viable military option.

The evidence for the third strike force is also crystal clear to anyone whose powers of observation are not crippled by our years of adherence to MAD. Most striking is the Soviet penchant for reloadable missile launchers. Over half of their missile silos are constructed so that after the first missile is fired, a second one can be inserted and ready for launch after several hours. It is even easier for the Soviets to reload their mobile missile launchers which are currently being deployed. The uncounted and uncountable extra missiles for these launchers constituted one of gaping flaws in the SALT II Treaty which

counted launchers only.

The number of reload missiles almost certainly exceeds 1000. They, of course, make absolutely no sense as first strike weapons. They make precious little sense as second strike weapons. They make eminent good sense as third strike weapons.

So what do we do?

We can, of course, continue to rely on Mutual Assured Destruction as we have in the past. We can continue to search for ways and means to create better offensive weapons and deploy them in enormously expensive ways to prevent their destruction by the Soviet first strike capability, ignoring the growing deterrent to the credibility of second strike inherent in the burgeoning Soviet third strike force, and hoping for the day when we can talk the Soviets into a reduction of a substantial portion of their missiles. In a curious sort of alliance, the all-offense elements of the Pentagon and the arms-control-only lobby will both press for this course of action, each, naturally stressing a different aspect of the MAD plus SALT formula.

The other course of action is the one laid out by President Reagan on March 23, 1983 -- do away with MAD by defending ourselves from first strike, the High Frontier strategy. We can and we must negate the usefulness of the Soviet first strike threat by making it incompetent. We do this by applying superior technology, especially space technology, which can so effectively filter a Soviet missile strike that it will never occur. No Soviet leader will ever seriously consider a 5, 10, or even 25 percent effective first strike with nuclear weapons. We must deter, but not by vainly striving to make a second strike

effective; we must make a first strike ineffective.

When we do this, the Soviets will have little need to maintain a massive third strike capability -- it will become irrelevant, and we might just be able to start a build-down of these most awesome and dangerous of nuclear weapons.